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## COMMENTS ON MUSEUM MANAGEMENT

By Professor William H. Goodyear

Curator of Fine Arts in the Brooklyn Museum

**I**N foreign countries the modern gallery of paintings is almost invariably separate from the historic art museum; you find them in different buildings and under wholly different direction. I do not know of any important European museum that unites the two. In this country I do not know of any important museum that does not.

The combination here of these two separate missions is unavoidable—unavoidable, simply because it happened. People had not sensed the distinction. The early history of our museums is a history of struggle. They are so recent that there was no time, when they were started, to make a proper study of museum management. As a result the distinction between the museum of historic art and the modern gallery of paintings was not understood, and the two were combined. I may say that, personally, I do not object to the combination, if it is properly managed.

But each of these missions demands separate points of view and probably, with rare exceptions, a different man. You can find men who combine in themselves the faculties for both kinds of museum direction, but the combination is so rare that people who endow museums should seriously consider the problems offered by a union of the two missions.

It also should be borne in mind that the first and foremost mission of a museum is not to collect modern art; and that, so far as it is devoted to historic art, its standpoint should be that of history. In other words, whatever inevitable deficiencies any museum director meets with in establishing his ideal of classification and sequence, he still should keep the idea of historical sequence in view. Any new museum, whether abroad or here, which has ambitions of a general and comprehensive character, will of necessity have numerous gaps in its sequence of original works of art and be compelled to wait long even to procure a few very good ones. Therefore it should, to begin with, project an educational plan that could be supported by reproductions such as casts and photographs. For an important mission of a museum is to let people know what is in other museums or in the world in general, so as to furnish them an outlook as to where the fine things are and how to place them when they do find them. Even in travel you can lay out an itinerary so as to follow, for example, the sequence of Italian art. You can begin with Ravenna for the period of great mosaic art, go to Padua and Assisi for the fourteenth century, Florence for the fifteenth, Rome for the sixteenth and greatest, and to the galleries and northern Italy for the seventeenth. People have done this at my suggestion. That is the way all art should be arranged in museums. A museum should present such an itinerary within its own walls.

We cultivate artistic taste by historic rather than by modern art for the same reason that prompts us to study the

masterpieces of literature rather than the contemporary best seller. There may be some great work in modern literature, but to appreciate it we must know the canons, the standards established by the whole world, which actually are the best. In Greek sculpture of the fifth century there is nothing bad; in the Italy of the fifteenth century there are no poor pictures. There were no art schools turning out painters by the thousand then.

The great things should be first in our training and point of view. As no museum can get those things quickly, it should begin with casts and photographs and gradually supplement these with originals. Most important of all, when a museum is projected, no matter how ambitious its director is, he should insist on a properly rounded balance in his exhibits. The selection not only must, but should correspond with the dimensions of the museum and the money at his disposal. But no matter how limited his space or means, his exhibits should be balanced to start with, so that his collections develop from the center outward and not from the circumference inward. I know there is a prejudice against casts on account of their dead whiteness. But they can be beautifully toned and always should be. As for photographs, I would call attention to the fact that almost nothing has been done to realize the really artistic possibilities of photographic enlargement.

Regarding the exhibition and choice of originals, the younger and the poorer a museum, the more closely should it confine itself in buying originals to the very highest class

of objects. There never would be any question of separating study collections from so called first-class exhibits, if this principle had been kept in mind—if museums had not spent money on things not quite worthy of installation. I am wholly opposed to this idea of separation, but I think the men who have proposed it and carried it out have been right, considering the problem they had to meet.

In Boston, for example, the theory amounts to nothing, but the result is interesting. The Boston museum has on exhibition in each department the very best things of their kind in this country. The fifteen or twenty blue and whites in their exhibition gallery are superb. The same is true of the few cloisonnés. They knock out everything in this country. But the point is that the museum should not have bought anything else, should not have anything not worth exhibiting. The simple fact of the matter is that the theory of separation of the study collections from the works of high class in the exhibition galleries, is the result of a museum being overloaded with inferior material. Thus the move in favor of study collections has two kinds of supporters. The first is a class of amateurs that does not understand the real value of archaeological and primitive art. The second consists of a few experts who are trying to keep up the standard of museum management by weeding out the less desirable things from the exhibition galleries and retiring them to the study rooms—which is better than storing them in the cellar.

At the beginning of this article I have drawn a distinction between the modern gallery and the museum of historic art.

Yet I would not give a snap for the curator of a museum of historic art unless he also had, with all his training for classic art, a good judgment for modern things. This however is an aside. For it is of first importance that he should be a good general historian. In this country we have very few such. We have too much specializing; and it tends to diminish the number of all-around men. In my opinion it is this fact that accounts for the deficiency in museum management. The demand for the ideal man is almost impossible to meet, but we must keep him in mind so as to get something near him; and at least the curator of a museum should understand how to secure the men who know what he doesn't.

The museums in this country not only are accidents in themselves, but accidents also in the men who run them. Many of them have been founded by people who didn't know what they wanted, and these museums also have been hampered in their proper development by the timidity of trustees, afraid to take definite action in important matters, because of their lack of expert knowledge, but also afraid to give complete authority to their curator. The only director or curator who can make a good museum, is he into whose hands the trustees place the museum's money to be spent as he chooses. Springfield, Mass., has an art museum founded by George Washington Vincent Smith. He made the collections, presented them to the city and is the curator of his own gift. As a result Springfield has one of the best balanced collections of decorative art in the world; an institution unique because, while so recent, it also is so excellent.

A question has been raised as to whether a museum should combine the fine and the industrial arts. There is no distinction between so called high art and industrial art. The proof is found in the Naples museum with its exhibition of household art from Pompeii. I do not believe in the creation of special industrial museums, like the South Kensington, which is due to a persevering utilitarian spirit desiring to show to mechanics, artisans and everyday people how far objects produced in historic times are worthy of their interest. But as the arrangement of objects according to their material is fatal to any knowledge of any subject, it may be said that separate industrial museums as represented by the South Kensington idea, have no system and never did have any.

The distinction in the Metropolitan Museum of Art between the department of decorative art and the other departments, appears to be a very doubtful one. It is all historic art and should be classified as such. It is very easy, however, for a museum to overload itself with so called industrial art, though the word itself is misleading. The finest Chinese porcelains are industrial art. So is the best sculpture of the Gothic period. Even Raphael's frescoes, being wall paintings, are industrial. Let a museum be well balanced and industrial art will take care of itself. After all, balance is the final word.